SPECIAL TRAINING SECTION

BRUCE LEE's RARE AND UNUSUAL TRAINING EQUIPMENT

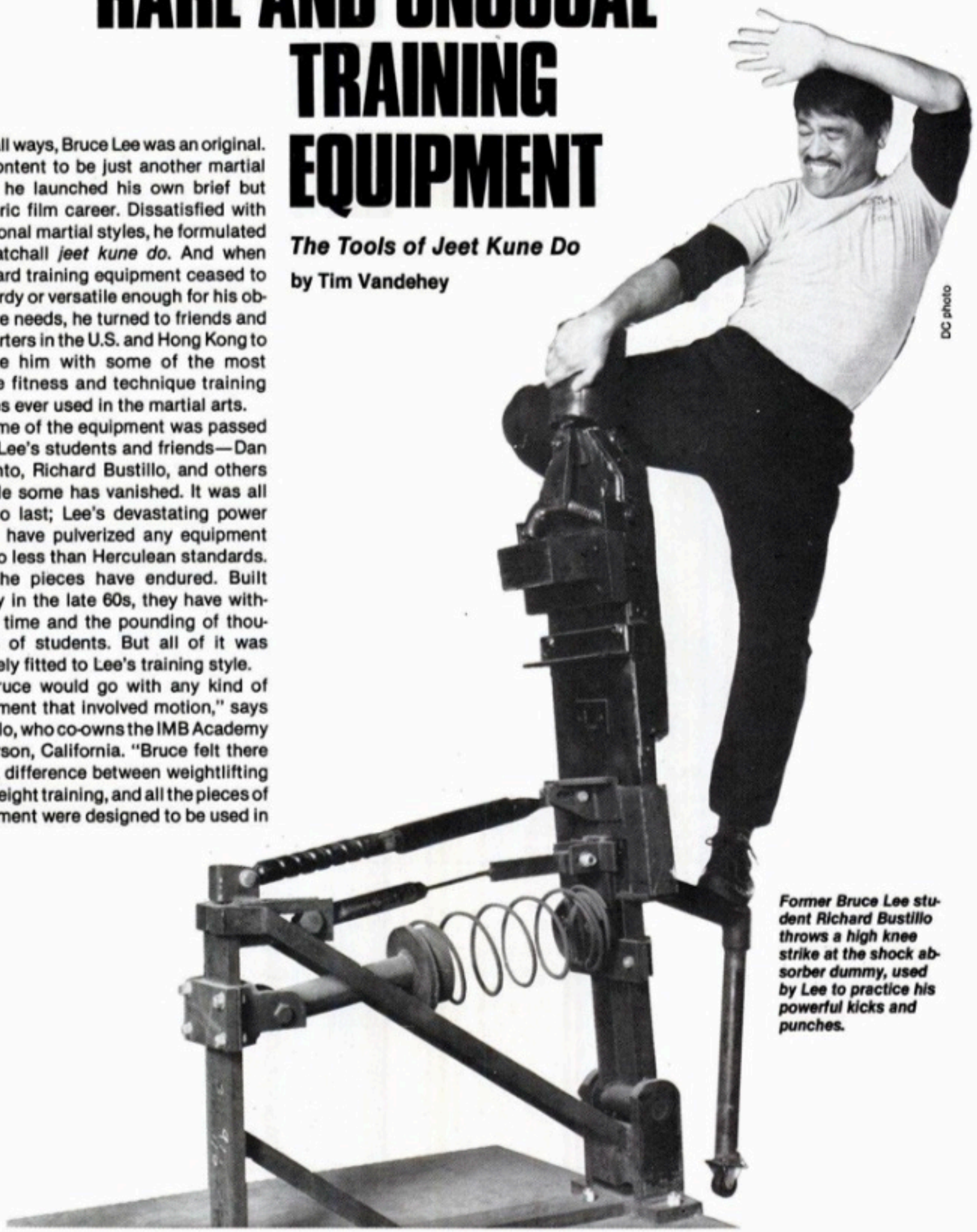
The Tools of Jeet Kune Do

by Tim Vandehey

In all ways, Bruce Lee was an original. Not content to be just another martial artist, he launched his own brief but meteoric film career. Dissatisfied with traditional martial styles, he formulated the catchall *jeet kune do*. And when standard training equipment ceased to be sturdy or versatile enough for his obsessive needs, he turned to friends and supporters in the U.S. and Hong Kong to provide him with some of the most unique fitness and technique training devices ever used in the martial arts.

Some of the equipment was passed on to Lee's students and friends—Dan Inosanto, Richard Bustillo, and others—while some has vanished. It was all built to last; Lee's devastating power would have pulverized any equipment built to less than Herculean standards. And the pieces have endured. Built mostly in the late 60s, they have withstood time and the pounding of thousands of students. But all of it was uniquely fitted to Lee's training style.

"Bruce would go with any kind of equipment that involved motion," says Bustillo, who co-owns the IMB Academy in Carson, California. "Bruce felt there was a difference between weightlifting and weight training, and all the pieces of equipment were designed to be used in



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Former Bruce Lee student Richard Bustillo throws a high knee strike at the shock absorber dummy, used by Lee to practice his powerful kicks and punches.

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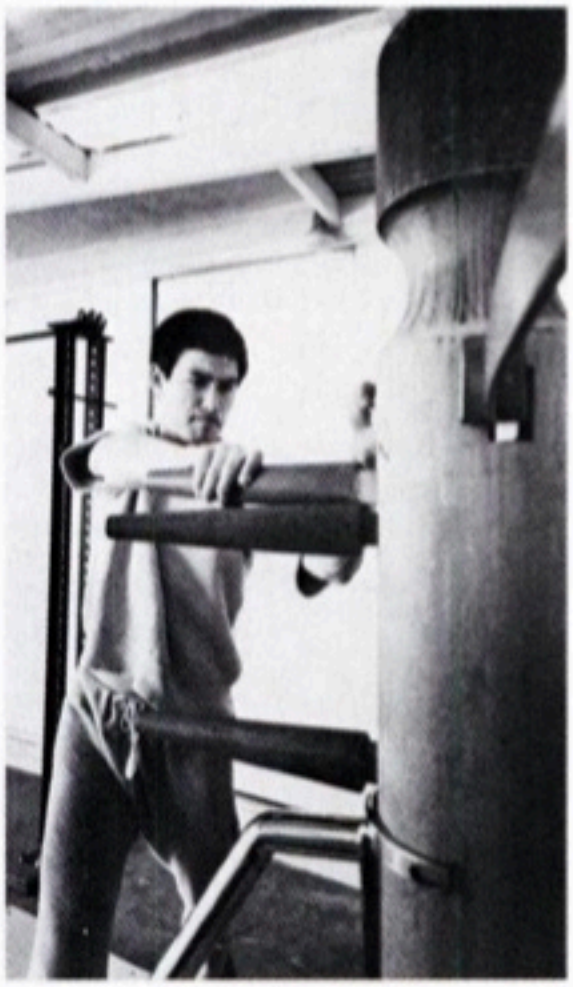
his kind of training."

In assembling this list of equipment, it is a near-certainty that we missed some pieces, apparatuses that have either been misplaced, given to unknown parties, or destroyed. But we have tried to collect as much information as possible about the unique equipment used by an equally unique martial artist.



The wing chun dummy was Bruce Lee's favorite training device. It could be used to practice punches, arm and hand traps, leg traps, and hand drills.

Wing Chun Dummy

The most famous of Lee's training devices, the wing chun dummy is not an original concept, but one that was redesigned to withstand Lee's hardest blows. The thick wooden post was fitted with wooden "arms" that could be pulled partially from the body of the dummy, and with a steel "leg" that curved down to simulate the position of an opponent's front leg. Lee used the dummy to practice the hand techniques of wing chun kung fu, his first martial style. It is now used by Inosanto to teach the hand traps and drills of the Filipino art of *kali*.

The dummy could be used for practicing hand energy drills, leg checks, sweeps, throwing grips, and hand-trapping techniques. It helped Lee develop increased hand speed and coordination, and the hard wooden surface also toughened his hands and fists.

Spring Arm

Used to practice *lop sao* pulling hands techniques of wing chun kung fu, this device has a wooden arm much like that on the wing chun dummy, which could be mounted on a wall or on a steel pole. A large spring attached to the arm made it resist if pulled toward the user and allowed the arm to move freely in all directions, like a human arm. The device was used to develop quickness and coordination in the forearms and upper arms for use in pulling-hands exercises, trapping techniques and blocks. Such resistance exercises would develop power and strength more effectively than simple weightlifting, and so were Lee's favorite training techniques.

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Richard Bustillo demonstrates the use of the spring arm, used by Bruce Lee to practice the "pulling hands" techniques of wing chun kung fu.

According to Bustillo, relying too much on the spring arm has put more than one student in a world of hurt. "Three of our senior members have dislocated their shoulders after using the lop sao machine and then going to a live partner," he says. "The partner is relaxed, and then wham! Here comes that pulling-hands technique, and it pulls the arms out of their sockets." →

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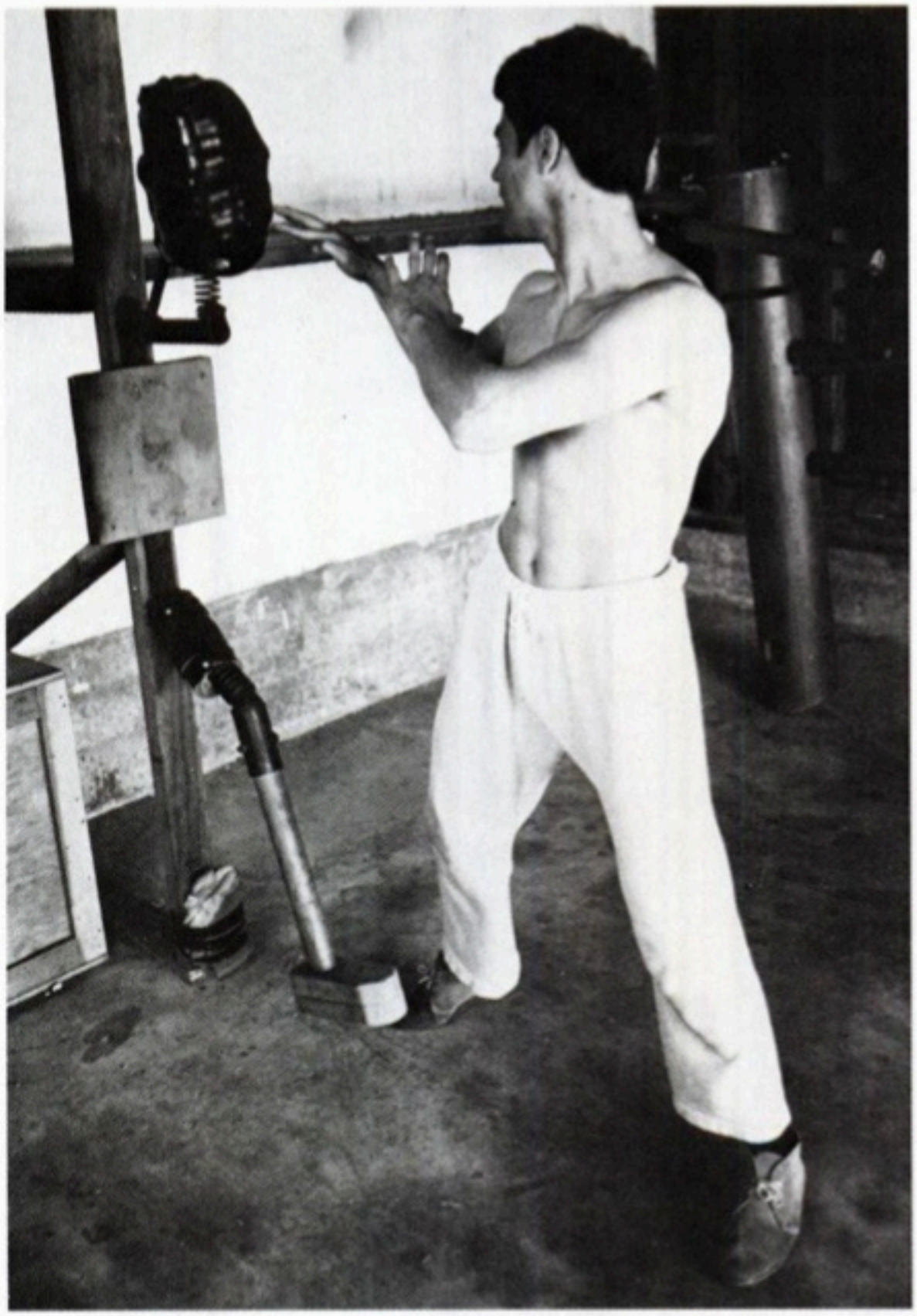

Bruce Lee liked to use the head dummy (above) to increase his speed and accuracy for face strikes, and to toughen his fingertips.

Head Dummy

This odd, anthropomorphic apparatus was also built by that clever welder and martial artist, James Lee. It consists of a simple steel mount, which can be free-standing or wall-mounted, supporting a featureless human head of black rubber which nods to and fro on a loose spring. At the bottom of the machine is the ever-present spring-mounted front leg used for sweeps and leg obstruction.

The rubber head acts as the face of an unfortunate opponent about to find himself on the receiving end of a lightning-quick Bruce Lee punch to the face, or a finger jab to the eyes. The machine was used by Lee to develop accuracy and speed with blows to the head, as well as toughening the fingertips for eye jabs.

Foot Obstructor

Another James Lee creation, this device was another in the long line of machines Bruce Lee used for perfecting his leg sweeps and low kicks. Somewhat like the matador, but stationary, the obstructor is a two-part wooden representation of a human upper and lower leg, mounted on springs. Its base is fixed to a steel wall plate, and steel springs support both sides and the rear of the leg, giving it full range of movement.

Lee used this device to practice leg sweeps, side kicks, and oblique kicks. The machine's firm spring action made it react to blows in much the same way as a human leg, making it one of Lee's most effective pieces of equipment.

Heavy Bag

What's unusual about a heavy bag? Nothing, except that this one weighs 300 pounds. A gift to Lee from an unknown source, such a heavy bag was necessary to stand up to the power of Lee's kicks.

"Bruce had to use a bag like this," says Bustillo. "He was so strong, that he'd do his exercises on this bag, and then if he went to one of the regular bags, he'd blow it away."

According to Bustillo, exercises on the heavy bag and the kicking shield were the most important training methods that Lee used after developing jeet kune do.

Kicking Block

One of Bruce Lee's more innovative personal designs, this apparatus was a simple, small *makiwara* board mounted on a metal frame and connected to points of the frame by ropes. Depending on the type of kick to be practiced, the strings could be adjusted and the angle of the board could be changed. The board would be turned downward for practicing a front kick, to the side for a hook or roundhouse kick, up for an axe kick, or left in a normal position for a side kick.

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It took a monster of a heavy bag to withstand Bruce Lee's powerful kicks, which probably would have put an ordinary bag through the ceiling.

Grip Exerciser

When you see this apparatus, it's no wonder that Lee had hands and forearms like iron. The grip exerciser is a small platform of steel rods, with the bottom half designed to slide up and down when gripped by the two top bars.

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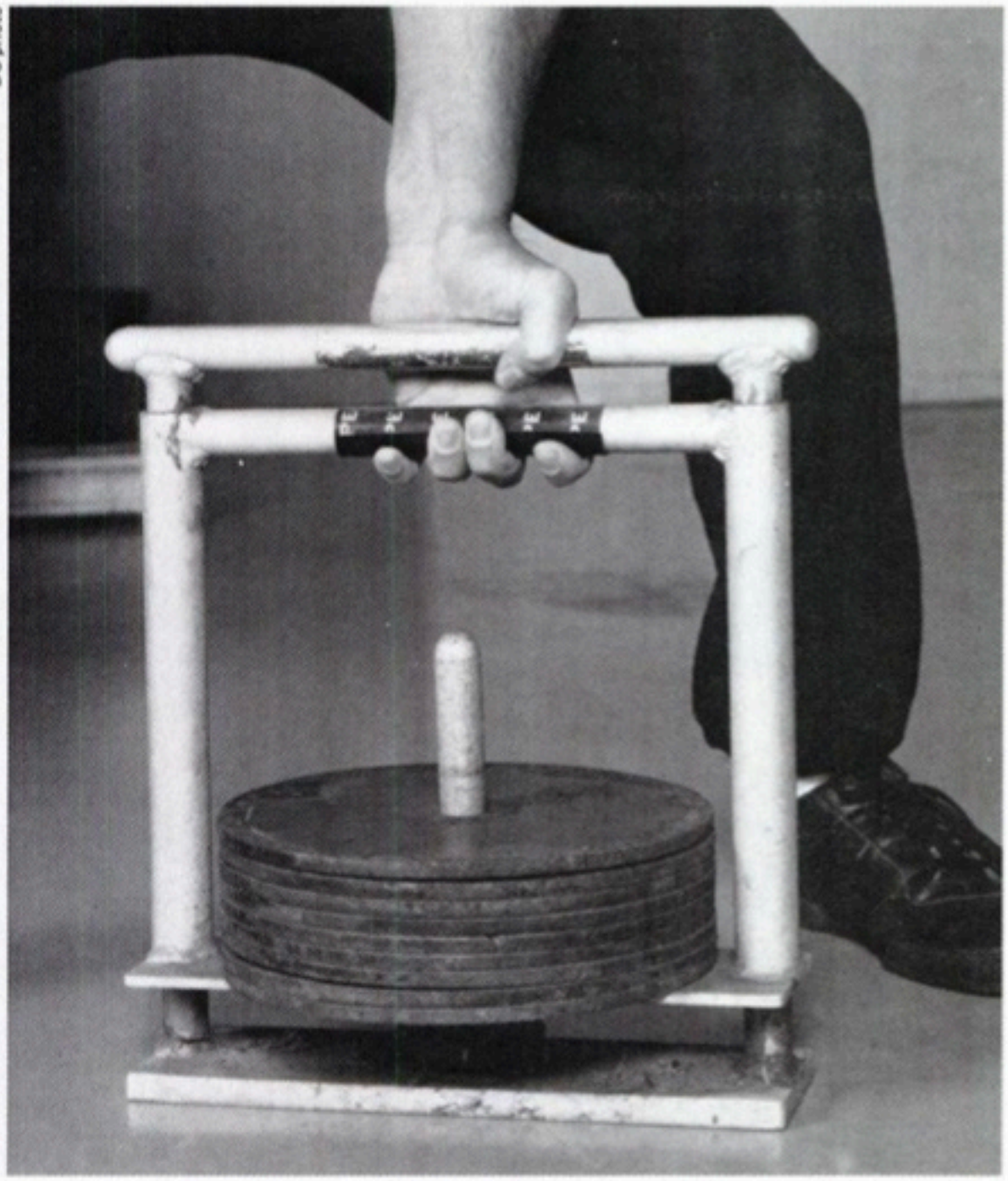

The grip exerciser (above) was one of Bruce Lee's most effective tools for developing the forearms, and was one of the reasons he had hands like iron.

The bottom of the device holds as many steel weight plates as the user wishes to attempt to lift. The weight is then lifted by grasping the two top bars in one hand and closing the hand as much as possible. It's very difficult. This machine was used to develop hand and finger strength, and to harden the forearms to perform vital blocks used in wing chun kung fu and kali.

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The matador (above) was used to develop quickness in both delivering low kicks to an opponent, and avoiding that opponent's kicks to the same area.

Matador

This piece was simplicity itself. It was used to practice delivering and blocking low front kicks in a sparring situation. It consists of a wooden block fixed with steel pins to a small dolly, which is manipulated by an instructor or senior student.

The user then tries to throw effective low side kicks at the board, while the assistant wheels the device away to avoid the kicks. The assistant can also move the matador toward the student to simulate an opponent's strikes, which must be blocked. The matador was used by Lee to develop speed with kicks, as well as efficient, quick footwork in a fighting situation.

Shock Absorber Dummy

Aptly named, this contraption was designed and built by the late James Lee. It is a noisy, man-high mix of huge automobile springs, car shock absorbers, steel rods, and time-worn padding. This machine was also used for Bruce Lee's resistance training. Rigorously constructed to absorb Lee's devastating blows, the dummy was used to practice side kicks, "one-inch" punches, elbow and knee strikes, and a number of leg- and foot-obstruction techniques. It was one of Lee's favorite machines, because its springs and coils made it give and react like a human opponent.

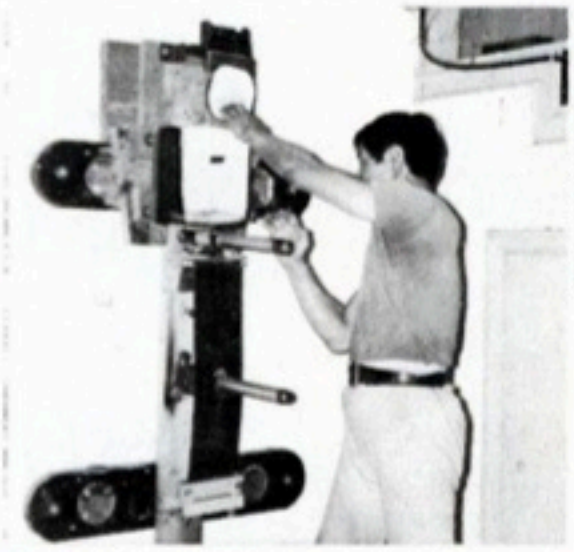

Photo courtesy of Linda Lee

Many of Bruce Lee's customized pieces of equipment were designed and built by his friend James Lee (above), a renowned martial artist and a welder by trade.

There are other examples of Bruce Lee's training equipment, most either alterations of ordinary machines or already widely known. They include his huge kicking shield, a one-and-a-half-foot thick pad which was necessary to spare his training partners the pain of broken ribs when Lee practiced his powerful kicks; his one-arm dumbbells, which he used to develop his formidable arm and shoulder muscles; the miniature makiwara board Lee had installed on his car dashboard, allowing him to toughen his hands while stuck in rush-hour traffic; and his oddly simple punching trainer, a single sheet of paper hung from the ceiling by a chain, which Lee would punch at rapid-fire speed, striving to develop quickness and technique in pulling his fist from the point of contact.

What we have gathered are some of Lee's fairly obscure, unusual pieces of equipment, which he used in his search for physical perfection that lasted all of his adult life.

Says Bustillo of that obsession: "Training was Bruce's love. He was like a musician, like Mozart. Mozart was kind of a wacko, because he didn't want to do anything else but play music. Bruce didn't want to do anything else but train. But it was his love, so how can you knock it? He got great results."

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